

NEIGHBORHOOD & COMMUNITY

South Carolina STRONG

Providing housing, education, and job and life skills for ex convicts and drug abusers

JOHN GLEMSER *director*

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CAUSE

Teach a man to fish—or build, or garden, or cook—and you will feed his life. That's the goal of South Carolina STRONG, a voluntary residential education program for rehabilitating criminal offenders, substance abusers, and homeless men. To gain economic self-sufficiency and the sense of responsibility needed to succeed in society, residents learn academic, vocational, and social skills. Relying on volunteers and donated materials, SC STRONG operates four training schools—construction, culinary arts/catering, furniture restoration, and landscaping—to teach specific job skills and provide income for the program.

IMPETUS

Each week, about 500 people are released from Charleston County Jail. Most are poor, illiterate, and unskilled. A third will end up back behind bars within three years, and those who don't will likely wind up without work and on welfare. "SC STRONG aims to reverse the cycle of poverty and crime and establish a new cycle of learning, caring, and economic, personal, and financial stability," says director John Glemser.

RESULTS

Since 2006, six men have fulfilled the two-year commitment, graduating with a GED and three marketable skills. Of the 40 others who completed 90 days or more, 82 percent have stayed out of jail. In two rehabbed properties, the program currently houses 25 residents, who are working to renovate a third building and raise capacity to 70.



Construction coordinator John Hamilton in the native landscaping training garden